

A photograph of a junkyard or scrap metal yard. In the foreground, a dirt road leads into the distance. On the left, a metal structure is cluttered with various items: a blue tarp, a yellow and black striped flag, and several old, worn tires. A license plate with the text "08 SP 80" is visible on the metal. On the right, a large, weathered metal beam stands vertically. A colorful, multi-tiered object, possibly a small boat or a decorative structure, hangs from a wire. The background shows a line of trees and a utility pole.

“The radiant future is taking place,
and the old world has been sent to the junkyard.”



POST SCRIPT

On the 11th of December, the court signed the destruction order for La *Chât-teigne*; the legal team responded saying that as numerous people actually lived there, they would also need an expulsion order before they came in with bulldozers. Just as the news of the order came out, a press release by the prefecture claimed that a police squadron had been “ambushed” by “fifty helmeted assailants wielding shields, Molotov cocktails and sling-shots.” Yet another attempt at criminalizing the movement and breaking the precious links of solidarity floundered when a farmer told French radio: “We respect their way of fighting. The violence comes from the police.”

Over a month later and the eviction has still not materialized, La *Chât-teigne* remains a hive of activity and each week a different support group from somewhere in France takes turns to run the hamlet and devise a week of events. There have been workshops in everything from samba dancing to Japanese Tanuki mask making, film screenings, photo exhibitions, gigs and discussions. In a few months time as the soil heats up, seeds will begin to sprout in the huge poly-tunnels that have been put up nearby.

As I finally finish this long overdue update, a three-day festival “Manifest ZAD”, with radical rapper Kenny Arkana headlining is ending. Despite another decree written to disrupt us, this time banning the erection of any marquees and police attempts to block food, water and other resources entering the festival site – 20,000 people braved winter weather and acres of mud to party against the airport and its world.

I have rarely laughed so much as we did that night, trying to dance and move in the ooze. It was so sticky that we kept getting sucked deep down into it, unable to move our legs anymore we were paralyzed by the grip of the earth, our bodies molded by mud. At one point I had sunk so far it took three grown men to pull my abandoned boot out. All we could do was to laugh. And amongst the classic slapstick scenes there was a spirit of solidarity that seemed unbreakable. Strangers became friends helping each other free themselves from this goo of life, this humid soil which is ultimately the living foundations of everything that feeds us, clothes us, enables us to breathe.

On La ZAD that night we were becoming mud, becoming part of this dark complexity, a teaspoon full of which holds four billion micro organisms recycling death into life for us all every day. The word humble has its roots in humus, it means to literally return to earth. Perhaps the future will be built by heroic acts of humility rather than arrogant temples to growth. Perhaps civilization’s dream to suck this Zone dry with its concrete and tarmac, steel and plastic will be vanquished by wetness.

“We don’t want to occupy
the territory, we want to
be the territory.”

The Coming Insurrection

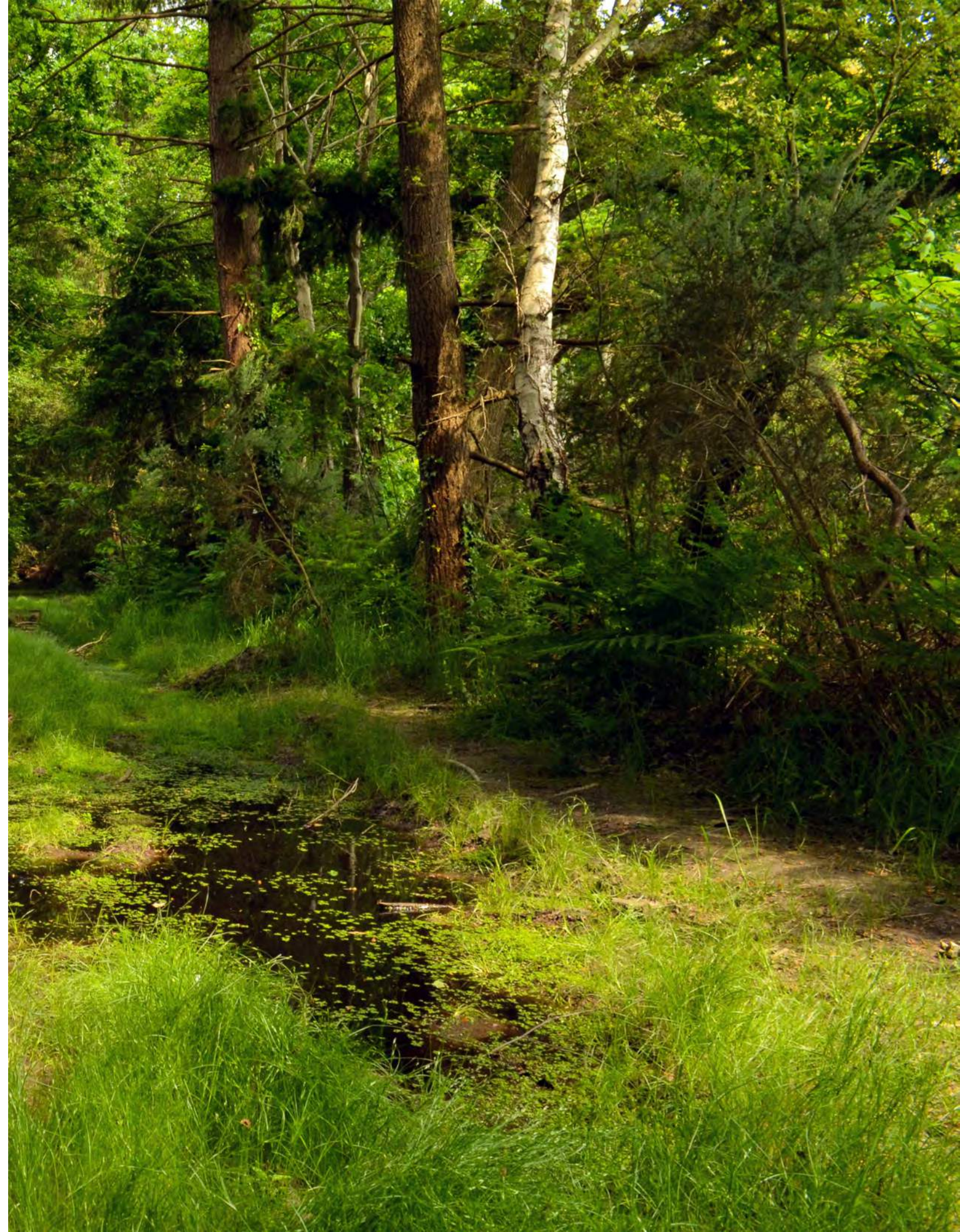
what they ignored was that it's the expectation of change that has most power. Even if it seemed an impossible contest on the ground, once the minds of a population had radically changed anything could happen.

To commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the wall, the BBC asked people in 27 countries if capitalism was working well, only 11% of those questioned said yes. Nearly one in four said it was a fatally flawed system and that another economic system was needed. It seems most of us now expect something different on the horizon. The problem is that we find it hard to imagine what something else looks and feels like, perhaps somewhere amongst the complex diversity of La ZAD we can find clues and directions, new maps and currents.

When the banner "Cesar you seem to be stuck in the mud!" was put up on the zone as the evictions began to go wrong, few thought that even some of Cesar's (the name of the police operation) soldiers would turn against their leaders.

Days after the last offensive, the main police officers' union published a flyer protesting the work conditions at Notre-Dames-des-Landes. The officers complained of too long hours, acute tiredness, disorganization and too much central command. An officer specializing in public order later admitted that given the "appropriate means" they could clear the entire Zone but that whatever happens it would be impossible to hold the territory: "we cannot stop people returning at night or the next day" he told the *Telegramme* newspaper. In his eyes there may have to be a permanent police presence from now till 2017 when the airport is due to open, but the extra costs will be astronomic.

The rise in security costs was one of several factors that decimated UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher's megalomaniac road building programme in the 1990's. Following protest camps on numerous road sites – in the trees, in nets above the road, underground, with ingenious networks of tunnels inspired by the Vietcong; the British government cancelled 700 future projects. In an economic dictatorship, where balancing the books is more important than saving the climate, this insane airport has more chance to be stopped because the budget doesn't stretch relatively with the people's militant resistance against omnicide.



Text adapted from The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination's
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labofii.net

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Oh, and a special thanks to whoever runs the site lepoucedejeu.wordpress.com for sharing
such beautiful images of the ZAD. Keep 'em coming, please!



interior decree that now bans all building materials from entering the Zone there are nearly as many dwellings as before the evictions began. Laura from the Sabot is just one of the many Zadists who lost their homes in the first wave of destruction and has now rebuilt a cozy new hut. At La *Chât-teigne* more buildings are rising, including a children's crèche, and due to the numbers of people passing through, another dormitory, this time made from roundwood. In the middle of the lake on the other side of La ZAD there is even a floating cabin that you can only access by rowboat. The dynamic equilibrium of this movement has returned, the no and yes in balance. Everyday life has become inseparable from struggle, as activists plant vegetables, tractors become barricades, rioters become builders and architecture an act of disobedience.



On the day following the Prime minister's call for dialogue, undercover cops masked up and dressed as activists infiltrated the middle of crowd behind a barricade. When the barricade was encircled and gassed by riot police and the crowd began to resist, the infiltrators broke cover. From the middle of the crowd they pulled out telescopic truncheons and arrested 5 people. One of them, named Cyrile, was sent to prison the following day for five months. Perhaps it was a last resort gesture, an attempt to throw the seeds of fear amidst us. Perhaps they wanted to awaken the cop in our heads, a cop that is much more dangerous than all the cops on the ground who for 3 months have failed to frighten us off.

Whatever it was, it backfired like every other brute state strategy. Cyrile's letters written from his prison cell, now widely circulating online, show he is neither frightened nor broken: "The common people mustn't submit," he wrote, "for this system is adrift. We are not far from running onto the rocks of global capitalism. We will not however leave this ship that can change course towards a better world. We aren't its captains, but it is us who sail it. There is a reverberating alarm call throughout La ZAD. You can't snuff it out forever."

Navigating towards an unknown future is a beautiful way of describing a truly anarcho-ecological politics, a politics where unity in diversity is fed by the power of natural spontaneity, the very key to all forms of evolution. In their worn out mechanistic logic governments still see managing the world as a game of chess, a dualistic strategy of opposing forces. Such logic of domination is an outmoded way of being in the world. Working against nature rather than with it and repressing the spontaneity of human and ecological systems, their thinking is as archaic as the grand construction projects built to control and shape the landscape in their like. The growing breed of revolutionary ecologists neither wants to dominate or surrender to the currents of the future, we just want to navigate them and create space for life to move on against the forces of extinction.

History shows us that the most powerful tool of rebellion is not the size of your party or the power of your weapons, but your ability to create the expectation of change. Insurrection is the art of feeding the imagination. Before October few doubted that the airport would be built, now thousands do and it's contagious. In the days leading up to the Egyptian uprising local activists spent time in shopping districts warning women that something was going to happen and that they should stock up on emergency food for their family. Revolutionary expectation became embodied in the material realities of everyday life.

In the late 80's few predicted how rapidly the changes would sweep across Eastern Europe, leading to the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Most experts looked at the balances of power, e.g. social movements size versus the state apparatus,

As we sit down to eat we hear that a few members of a group of elected councilors and MP’s (which numbers over 1000 and have named themselves strategically if somewhat humorously: *The Collective of Representatives Doubting the Pertinence of the Project of Notre-Dame-des-Landes*) have chained themselves to the railing of the prefecture in Nantes. They are demanding a meeting with the prefect, no dialogue can begin, they say, until all police operations stop on the zone.

A band arrives. They cross the churned up mire, carrying accordions, guitars and a small child on their backs. A police helicopter buzzes overhead; it must be observing the ants back at their rebel work. The band begins to play gipsy tunes. Then in the distance we hear the rumble of machinery. It’s heading towards us. It’s getting louder and louder. It sounds like dozens of huge engines approaching rapidly.

From the next-door clearing we hear a thunderous applause. It’s tractors, fifty of them! They have forced their way pass the police blockades and have come to protect La *Chât-teigne*. The farmers spend the rest of the afternoon chaining each tractor together in a ring. Real western style – circle the wagons! They promise to leave them there and set up a rotor for the weeks to come. Farmers from across the region together with activists will keep watch in the chestnut grove every night. Every time the state attacks us, the social ecology of this movement gets healthier; the unity in diversity flourishes and the movement becomes more and more resilient.



One of the most unexpected parts of this diversity is the group of 200 airplane pilots “doubting” the new airport. Some of them have been wondering why when planes approach the already existent Nantes airport, the control tower changes their course to pass over the heavily built-up north of the city, instead of over the more rural south: “We think it’s to incite the general public to want the airport moved elsewhere,” pilot Thierry Mason told *Le Monde* newspaper. A



recent letter from one of them to the French president explains with solid statistics that due to the economic crisis, rising fuel costs (e.g. Peak oil) and the UN Kyoto CO2 commitments; all talk of future growth in European air traffic is a fiction, and this project is useless. Some of the pilots fly over the Zone in micro-lights taking pictures. From the air, La *Chât-teigne* is looking more and more like Asterix’s rebel Gallic village.

Following the weekend overtures from the State, the prefecture

promised to pull back all the police if: “all illegal construction stopped”. The Zadists refused through practice. The Zone has never seen so many new huts, tree houses and guerilla architecture popping up so quickly. Despite a ministry of



October 2012, Notre dames des Landes, France



Chris leans forward, her long fingers play with the dial of the car radio “I’m trying to find 107.7 FM“... a burst of Classical music, a fragment of cheesy pop. “Ah! Here we go! I think I’ve got it?” The plastic pitch of a corporate jingle pierces the speakers: “*Radio Vinci Autoroute: This is the weather forecast for the west central region...happy driving to you all. Traffic info next.*” Chris smiles.

The narrow winding road is lined with thick hedgerows. Out of the darkness the ghostly outline of an owl cuts across our headlights. We dip down into a wooded valley; the radio signal starts to splinter. The well-spoken female voice fractures into static, words tune in and out and then another kind of sound weaves itself into the airwaves. We

rise out of the wood onto a plateau, the rogue signal gets clearer, for a while two disturbingly different voices scramble together – the slick manicured predictable sounds of Radio Vinci wrestles with something much more alive, something rawer – a fleshier frequency.

“*The cops have left the Zone for the night...good riddance... Yeah! Keep it up everyone!...*” There is a moment of silence, we hear breathing, then a scream into the microphone “*This is Radio Klaxon...Klac Klac Klac!*” We feel her emotion radiate through the radio waves “*It’s nine thirty five.*” She laughs and puts a record on, passionate Flamenco guitar pumps into the car.

We have entered La ZAD (“Zone to Defend” or “Zone of Permanent Autonomy”, depending on who you ask) – Europe’s largest post-capitalist protest camp – a kind of rural occupy on the eastern edge of Brittany, half an hour’s drive from the city of Nantes. Like a rebel constellation spread across 4000 acres of forest, farmland and marshes, it takes the form of old squatted farms and fields, DIY strawbale houses, upcycled sheds, theatres and bars cobbled from industrial pallets, hobbit-like round houses, cute cabins built with the world’s waste, huts perched frighteningly high in trees and a multitude of other disobedient architectural fantasies.

La ZAD has been a laboratory for ways of living despite capitalism since the 2009 French Climate Camp. At the camp activists and locals put together a call for people to come and live on the Zone to protect it. Now you can find illegal goat herds and organic bakeries, bike workshops and bee hives, working farms and communal kitchens, a micro brewery, a mobile



library, and even a pirate radio station: *Radio Klaxon*. Emitting from a secret location somewhere in the Zone, the station hijacks the airwaves of “Radio Vinci Autoroute” the traffic information channel run by Vinci for its private network of French motorways. The world’s largest multinational construction firm, builders of nuclear power stations, African

Ministries of Environment, Transport and Agriculture, saying that the forest clearance work that was due to begin in January, would be delayed for six months to make sure all the environmental regulations were followed. Whilst confirming the “economic necessities for building the airport”, it said that until an independent group of scientists had made all the assessments on biodiversity, the clearance would not take place. Also mentioned was the setting up of a mission to work with locally affected parties to find ways to minimize the destruction of agricultural land.

Then later that night as the gendarmes attacked the barricades on the lane leading to the *Chât-teigne*, another government communiqué was sent out. This time from the airport’s champion, Prime Minister Ayrault. “For the sake of appeasement” it said, the government had decided to set up a “dialogue commission” and was inviting those against the airport to come to the table. He did however make it clear that there was no doubt at all about the project being built!

Immediately ACIPA responded; they refuse to take part until all forces of order retreated from the zone, to which the minister of interior responded: “There are never conditions to dialogue.”

As the clashes continued under blindingly bright police floodlights, a characteristic response to the “negotiations” was penned by a handful of Zadists. It had twenty one “non-exhaustive, open demands” that included: the closing of all companies with more than 12 employees, a life time’s income for all workers, twenty hours of sunshine in winter, nuclear energy replaced by ministers’ pedaling, the Élysée (President’s residence) transformed into a wetland, Valls and all members of the Ministry of Defense and Interior to get “fuck the cops” tattooed on their foreheads, pipelines to be used only for transporting fruit juice, 60 acres of land be given to everyone who has ever lived on la ZAD, and the final demand, “that all negotiations be made illegal” – perfectly rounding off this fitting response to the farce of democracy, where “dialogue” is not about resolving a problem but simply an exercise in saving face whilst continuing business as usual.

By Sunday morning when the police stopped their assaults and returned to their now customary roadblocks, 100 activists had been injured, many from direct hits by concussion grenades and rubber bullets. By law these have to be fired at 30 degrees in the air and not aimed at people. An outraged local doctor wrote to the ministry of interior listing the injuries. “The shrapnel from grenade explosions, “sometimes up to a centimeter long” she wrote, could on entering



the body have “reached arteries, nerves or vital organs”. Shocked she described how the ambulances were deliberately slowed down by police blockades.

PM

A mass picnic has been called for Sunday lunch to continue to build La *Chât-teigne*. We arrive armed with bread, cheese, wine, and a handful of tools – of which, over 11,000 Euros worth have been taken away by the authorities. Groups are busy picking up the thousands of tear gas canisters

that litter the forest; there are plans to turn them into Christmas garlands to decorate socialist party head quarters. The settlement is still standing, a few windows have been smashed, our cast iron bathtub boiler has been broken in half, plumbing inside the bathroom has been damaged and all the bedding in the dormitories contaminated with CS gas. But hundreds of people have returned to bring back some utopian spirit to the chestnut grove. We get to work repairing, cleaning up and building an extra touch to the *Black Bloc Sanitaire*: a lookout tower! The familiar and reassuring sound of hundreds of hammering hammers has returned to the forest.

Sunday 25th November

AM

My hands are still stinging as I type. I have washed them five times but the toxic tear gas molecules sink deep into ones pores. Whilst I was in the Rohanne forest I jotted down the company name and telephone number that was written on the side of one of the bulldozers. Given the fact that the drivers wear balaclavas to hide their identity, it seemed that someone had forgotten to cover up this interesting information. When I got home I emailed the details to La ZAD’s web site, which has a captivating minute-by-minute updated information time line. Within a couple of hours of the company details being posted online, they were forced to make a public statement claiming that they had sold that particular bulldozer to someone else. They claimed that they had been inundated with emails and telephone calls since the posting.

A few months ago there were a handful of local support groups against the airport, now there are over 180 and even if people are unable to physically be present on the Zone there are extremely efficient and simple forms of virtual resistance springing up. The job offer to do the pro airport public relations work on the internet’s social networks, had to be withdrawn following it leak – on social networks! Bogus enquiries for the job application to be sent out shoved a spanner into the employer’s bureaucracy.



The police operations on the Zone lasted from Friday to the early hours of Sunday morning with increasing state violence. On Saturday there were 400 people on the ground in the Rohanne forest, some courageously resisting by stripping naked and forming a human chain, but they were repressed and unable to stop the tree houses and cabins being evicted and destroyed. That afternoon 8000 supporters of the struggle took to the streets of Nantes facing a militarized city. As water cannons pummeled the crowd seemingly out of nowhere a communiqué arrived from the

uranium mines, oil pipelines, motorways, car parks and the infrastructure of hyper-capitalism everywhere, Vinci also happen to be the company commissioned by the French government to cover this landscape in concrete and open Nantes new airport (it already has one) by 2017. *Well that’s the plan.*

The irony of this checkered land of tiny fields framed by miles of rich hedgerows, is that unlike the rest of France, it escaped the regrouping process of the 60’s which annihilated the ancient field patterns to open up large tracts of land to industrial agriculture. If the original airport plans, designed to host Concorde, had succeeded this land would have been under tarmac by 1985, luckily it was never built and so the old field patterns remain, as do the faded painted signs that date from the first protests 40 years ago, placed along the side of the road by local farmers declaring: “NON A L’AEROPORT”.



Our car pulls into “la vache rit” a temporary HQ housed in a giant barn that belongs to one of dozen local farmers who has refused to sell their land to the state. A mural on the façade shows a plane disguised as a bale of hay with an indignant farmer, pitchfork in hand, shouting up at it: “you ‘aint going to con us!” Inside the barn, hundreds of people mill around, there are grey haired pensioners, farmers in muddy overalls, a sprinkling of hippies, folk in black hoodies adorned with headlamps and more than a handful of dogs. Food is being cooked and people are browsing the largest “free shop” I’ve ever seen (a space where there is no monetary exchange). Long tables bend under piles of clothes all sorted neatly and signposted: *jumpers, trousers, rain jackets, boots* (with boxes for different shoe sizes) there is even a box marked *dirty socks* under one filled with dry ones. Locals from the nearby village of Notre-Dames-des-Landes wash the socks regularly. Another table has mountains of medical supplies whilst the kitchen is drowning in pasta. Supporters from the four corners of France have donated all this material over last week since the evictions began.

On the 16th of October 1200 riot police overran La ZAD. What had been a state free autonomous zone for 3 years was transformed within a few hours into a militarized sector. Road blocks sealed the area, Guard Mobiles (military mobile



gendarme units) swarmed everywhere and bulldozers groaned across the fields. Despite resistance from the Zadists within two days the state had destroyed 9 of the 12 of the squatted spaces. On one of the days, 250 rounds of tear gas were fired into the market garden, seemingly to contaminate the vegetables that until that moment had fed over 100 Zadists every week. A principle of war is of course: cut off the supplies.

In the afternoon lorries guarded by convoys of riot vans carried away every sign of habitation - every lump of rubble or shard of broken furniture, smashed crockery or child’s toy – everything – nothing remained but mud and the scars of bulldozer tracks. This act of

erasure was not only to make sure that the wreckage would not be used to rebuild the houses, but more importantly to wipe out all traces of history. Ruins hold memories and stories; and a principle of resistance is that stories stoke struggle.

“The movement is finished”... the local representative of the ministry of interior Patrick Lapouze told the press “For two years... it’s been a lawless zone. I can’t even go there without police protection and when I go I get stones raining down on my car.” Sounding more like a wild west Sheriff than a twenty first century civil servant, he continued: “We are going to stop them returning...When there are only 150 of them entrenched in a barn, they won’t last long!”

Raising the stakes somewhat he ends his statement: “If the République is unable to reclaim this area, then we should be worried for the République.” As these words left his lips the images of an elderly woman collecting teargas canisters from a vegetable garden, ancient farmhouses being torn down, and farmers pushed around by riot police were circulating across the country and seemed to be touching a nerve.

The airport is the pet project of ex mayor of Nantes, now prime minister – Jean marc Ayrault. Nick named “L’ Ayraultporc” (a brilliant play on words merging airport and pig) his ratings had already hit record bottom before all this and now it seems his megalomaniac vision, might be a bigger thorn in his side than he ever imagined.

Ayrault has promoted the project as a “green” airport. It is planned to have living roofs covered in plants, the two runways have been designed to minimize taxiing to save on CO2 emissions and an organic community supported box scheme is meant to feed its employees. Next year Nantes will celebrate its latest award: European Green City 2013.



To call this double speak is generous. According to a recent report a hundred million people will die of climate driven deaths over the next eighteen years. 80 percent of the slaughtered will be in countries with lower emissions. The Climate Catastrophe is no just a threat to our ecosystems and the species we share the biosphere with, it’s a violent war on the poor. A war whose weapons are built out of steel and concrete, tarmac and plastic, a war with a ticking methane bomb hiding under the arctic. Waged by the logic of growth and disguised as everyday life according to capitalism, climate change is the war that could end all wars and all life with it. Calling an airport green is as cynical as calling a concentration camp humane. Perhaps in the future, if we are

lucky to have one, descendents will contemplate the ruins of airports as we do the sites of 18th century slave markets and wonder how a culture could have committed such barbarity so openly.

I’m fast asleep in the *Cent Chenes* (one hundred oaks). For three years people from post-capitalist movements across Europe have made their way here to build alternative lives and lay a new geography over the cartography of capitalism. There is a delicious panoply of new place names, including: *La Bellishrut*, *Pinky*, *La Saulce*, *Phar Wezt*, *No Name*, *La cabane des filles* (the girl’s cabin) and the mythical *Le Sabot* (the clog) named for its reference to peasant life as well as the fact that it is the root of the word Sabotage, which literally means to throw your clog into the gears of the machine.

Little do I know, as I dream of police dogs devouring stray cats, that Hurricane Sandy has just hit Haiti and is on its way to New York. Last time I was here in this beautiful strawbale home made entirely from the waste of the world it had a working bakery (supplying Zadists and neighbors with daily organic Bread) and an abundant Permaculture garden. With the threat of expulsion the baker moved his oven to a safer (legal) space nearby and the other inhabitants including Katell, who teaches in the local primary school, took everything of value to the safe house. Now *Les Cent Chenes* is a ghost of what it was and has been handed over as a collective sleeping space for the activists that have streamed in over



More and more people are arriving on the Zone, there must be well over 1000 resisting.

In the Rohanne forest hundreds use their bodies to block the bulldozers and specialized police climbing team from tearing down the new cabin and tree houses. It’s clear that the authorities would not be able to move the crowd without resorting to violence. When faced with civil disobedience tactics it seems they are less trigger happy especially with the media presence and shift in public opinion.

Evening falls, the gendarmes have stood around the immobile machinery all day and don’t want to be in the forest after dark. Their retreat is followed by a torrent of airborne mud and the cry: “We live here and we will stay here!” As we chase them out of the woods Lucille tells me about a new technique. If you aim the mud at the top of the knees, the ooze slides down between the leg and the body armor and means that the riot cop can’t bend his knees anymore. With a bit of luck he soon topples over like a Playmobil character!



The diversity of tactics at la ZAD seems to be working and is clearly destabilizing for the gendarmes. They never know whether they are going to walk around a hedgerow and meet a line of protesters using civil disobedience tactics, or face a hail of beer bottles from behind a barricade or an angry farmer blockading with several tones of tractor. At no point since the evictions have the farmers or the ACIPA (ngo) condemned the more militant tactics.

As we make our way to the evening coordination meeting, Radio Klaxon lists dozens of solidarity actions taking place across the country. Tractors have blocked the road bridges of Nantes and St-Nazaire and crowds are assembling in front of prefectures in over 30 cities. In St Affrique, Aveyron (700 kms away), the town hall is occupied and several councilors in favor of the airport have been locked in. In Paris an unauthorized demo has just ended with seventy-eight arrests. It seems that the ant’s nest has been well and truly disturbed!

Ishmel runs up to us. “Apparently the operation is being run by the Minister of Interior himself! They have announced that they are confiscating all the tools and building materials. Bu doesn’t look like they are going to flatten it today!” he says, as yet another concussion grenade ruptures the forest air. We tune back into Radio Klaxon, the Minister of Interior Valls has just told the press that the operation was to “stop a cyst from growing,” that he could not “let a base camp be installed, whose sole role was to lead violent actions”. Within seconds of his statement, twitter is alive with word plays, our favorite being “Valls – cyst my ass!”

Friday 23rd November

The morning is still, the dormant landscape is wrapped in the hush of winter. The new dormitories in the chestnut grove are packed with sleeping bodies snuggled up warm and cozy. The sun slowly limps above the horizon. Then the sound of smashing glass. Tear gas canisters are thrown into the dormitories, police officers scream. Everyone, including children, is pushed out into the cold. Simultaneously, a kilometer down the road hordes of gendarmes on foot bypass the new barricades by going via the fields. The first building to be squatted at la ZAD, an old farmhouse named *Les Rosier*, is rapidly evicted. The news travels fast; we jump in the car and head for the zone.

Isa and I arrive via a network of green lanes that don't have police roadblocks on them. Radio Klaxon announces that bulldozers are on their way to La *Chât-teigne* and that *Les Rosier* is already half destroyed despite the ten farmers' tractors blocking the farm yard. Are they really going to knock down La *Chât-teigne* even though the court case hasn't gone through? 40,000 people helped build it, tearing it down will have an impact on so many people whose lives were touched by the magic of the reoccupation action.

We run through the fields and reach the Rohanne forest, it's completely surrounded by gendarmes. There are over 500 on the Zone now, the area is totally shut down. We gather a small crowd and manage to break through a police line in the adjoining field, our hands raised in the air: "Only *you* are armed," we chant. We burst into the forest. As we run we glimpse other bodies darting through the thick trees, dozens of figures all heading towards La *Chât-teigne*. We come across an affinity group huddled behind a tree covering their faces with chalky white anti tear gas lotion.

"What's happening?" I ask. "Its full-on down there!" one of them replies "It's war!" We keep going drawn by the crack of tear gas grenades.



The low winter sun's ray's bounce off the gendarmes shimmering shields. Hundreds of them ring the clearings. Bulldozers pulling hulking skips churn up the earth like entrails, trees have been flattened and the air is thick with tear gas. What was once a new rebel hamlet filled with life and creativity has become a battlezone. The collective kitchen is now a stockpile of wooden ammunition cases filled with tear gas grenades waiting to be shot at us and the meeting room has become the gendarmes temporary HQ.

Some people stand and talk to the police lines trying to reason with them, others try to approach the cabins from every angle charging out of the forest screeching. Sticks, distress flares and stones fly through the air, rubber bullets bounce off the tree trunks. "Put her in your sites..." an officer in front of us commands his gun wielding colleague, "that will get her to leave." Isa freezes in fear. We turn around and take cover behind a coppiced chestnut tree. I'm beginning to be able to recognize the difference between the smoke trail arc of a teargas canister and a concussion grenade. "Put your fingers in your ears!" I scream, as one lands next to our feet and explodes in a deafening din. No wonder the birdsong has gone from the grove.

the last days, from across the country and abroad, to put their bodies in the way of the evictions. We sleep here to be at hand when the police arrive at the *Le Sabot* nearby, which is still holding out.

Le Sabot is the market garden now contaminated by CS gas. It was born in the spring of 2011, when over a thousand people armed with spades and seeds coordinated by the international radical young farmers movement *Reclaim The Fields*, occupied a couple of acres of land in the centre of the Zone and overnight turned it into a functioning vegetable farm. It has its own two-roomed cabin, a poly-tunnel, solar shower and now a ramshackle penthouse on the roof, to climb onto in case of expulsion. Merging resistance and tangible alternatives, *Le Sabot* reflects the post-capitalist politics of refusing to separate critique and construction, the yes and the no.



I spend the day with Ishmel an art activist and one of the founders of the French Clown Army. His home La Bellishrut was burnt to the ground last week. "How come you're still smiling?" I ask as we walk through the dense network of green lanes that joins up the dots of this rebel constellation. "I don't care about material things, when we build something we know it won't be forever." We build barricades until sunset. Ishmel has managed to get hold of the old set that the Nantes Opera House were throwing away, it happens to be from an opera about the holocaust. The massive wooden panels make perfectly surreal barricading material.

Since the evictions began the art of building barricades has taken over everyday life here. Everywhere you go there are little teams busy hauling materials across fields to erect another barricade. The idea is to slow the advance of the authorities, who have named their operation "Cesar" (Caesar), perhaps a reference to Obelix and Asterix's resistant Gallic village. The police have taken the weekend off and so barricade building takes place unhindered. Now there are ones rising on the main roads as well as the green lanes. The multiplicity of different barricades reflects the different cultures at La ZAD. Those living in tree houses in the Rohanne Forest have asked people not to cut living trees to make them, whilst in another part of the Zone a team of chainsaw wielding activists are tacking down oak trees and tangling steel rope in them. On one crossroads there are at least 20 barricades. There are huge hay rounds with cans of petrol

beside them ready to set alight when the police attack, there is a steel wall of sitex – Anti squatting panels normally placed on doors and windows of empty houses – carefully welded together and one made from dozens of bamboo poles sticking out of the tarmace decorated with bicycle wheels. In the middle of it all there is makeshift kitchen with its mobile pizza oven made from an oil drum.

An affinity group armed with cordless angle grinders and pick axes, have been working day and night to cut out giant trenches in the roads - in some cases several meters wide and deeper than a standing adult. Ishmel tells me that yesterday road agency workers came to mend one of the smaller trenches (not surrounded by barricades). People talked to the workers, trying to persuade them to turn around and not do the dirty work of Vinci. Despite having their boss on the phone coercing them to keep going, they eventually turned around and left the hole in the road. One of the workers later said “What troubled me most was that I’m from around here and (clearing the barricades to allow the police to circulate) feels a bit like I was helping demolish my neighbors house.”There have also been stories of local police officers that refused to join the operation.

The crisp autumn sky swarms with stars. A full moon throws shadows of gnarly oak trees across the fields. We end the evening in *Le Sabot*, dozens of us sitting around the wood burning Agar to eat a delicious Dauphinoise (a hot pot of potatoes and garlic) garnished with freshly picked Cepp mushrooms. Radio Klaxon plays in the background as always: “*We have some news: 15 more cop vans have been spotted on the motorway driving in this direction*”. There are already 30 parked up for the night in the aptly named *Disco Paradiso* nearby, it seems the second wave of “operation Caesar” may well hit tomorrow. Laura, who has been on walky-talky all day to coordinate the defense, picks up a piece of chalk and on the blackboard which used to be where the dates for planting and harvesting crops were written up; she scrawls angrily: *NON!*





It's 6am. We walk through the thick morning mist. Nebulous silhouettes appear out of nowhere passing us on the lane, people are calmly making their way to the barricades. We carry a small radio, the finger tapping beat of the Latino hip hop group Cypress Hill keeps us awake: *"When the shit goes down you better be ready!"* Coffee is served in *Le Sabot*. Laura is glued to her walky-talky. Gweno, ties his T-shirt around his head to make a DIY balaclava through which you can still see his cheeky smiling eyes. He climbs over the first barricade, in which Ishmel planted bunches of flowers last night and nails a large sign to a tree opposite: *Zone of Struggle: Here the people command and the government obeys*. It's a phrase from the Zapatista autonomous indigenous communities in Chiapas. Messages of solidarity have been sent from Chiapas and many of the activists here feel a strong link to the masked rebels who since 1994 have built zones free of the state and capitalism in the jungles of southern Mexico. Many of the Zadists also wear masks during actions, to resist being identified by the police, but also perhaps, to be in tune with the spirit of Zapatismo, where a masks both hides you and makes you more visible and where being nobody and yet everybody is a source of freedom.

"They are coming!" Laura shouts! The cabin empties except for Marie, grey haired and in her sixties, who continues cooking, un-phased by the news of attack. Through the mist the glint of dozens of riot shields can be seen advancing down the lane towards *Le Sabot*. Time speeds up: the barricade is set alight, huge flames cut through the dawn light, we hear the sharp crack of tear gas canisters being shot at us, rotten vegetables, paint bombs and stones arc into the sky. I see Gwen running through the field holding one of the shields he has lovingly made: "Be careful you are walking on our beatroot," it says on it. For a moment we can't tell what is CS gas and what is morning mist, then our skin begins to scream in pain, Ishmel passes us lemon juice. The boom of concussion grenades being fired several kilometers away thunders across the plateau, *Radio Klaxon* tells us that they have attacked the forest simultaneously and are trying to take people out of the trees.

It takes several hours for the police to get through the barricades at *le Sabot*, by the time they arrive in the garden most of us have dissolved into the landscape. A few people remain on the roof of the cabin and Marie continues to cook inside. "You will never get rid of us" a woman in a pink bandana shouts from the roof "we will be back and we will plant even more vegetables!"

We hear the sound of the samba band in the distance. We follow the rhythm to try and meet up with it, weaving through fields and hedgerows to avoid the roaming riot police. We pass through a field of high corn; several tractors and a huge harvesting machines are ploughing through it. For a minute the image of normal agricultural life taking place a few hundred meters from burning barricades and flying rubber bullets seems incongruous, but then we see that it's Sylvain Fresneau driving the machine. Fresneau is one of the 100 local farmers who are due to be expropriated. He has refused to be bought off by the state. On the lane next to his field there are a thirty tractors flying the Confederation Paysan flag (Independent peasants union) backed up against a line of riot police. The tractors were meant to have reached *Le Sabot* in solidarity, but got blocked here. It seems however that they have at least managed to allow Fresneau to harvest his silage. For him, to simply do his everyday job on this land is an act of resistance.

We finally meet up with the samba activists. They have marched across the fields to the side of the Zone where bulldozers are clearing barricades off the roads and the relics of rural rioting litter the tarmac. We follow the band into the nearby forest where they play under the tree houses, the police haven't got here yet. Like a nimble tree sprite Natasha glides down from her platform. Rolls of rope and jangling karabiners hang from her climbing harness. Someone on the ground below has just picked a mushroom and is wondering what species it is. A professional botanist, Natasha immediately identifies it: "it's a Russule ... super tasty!" she declares before climbing gracefully back up into her towering tree.

More than anyone she is aware of how ecosystems are networks of complementary relationships, constantly in the process of becoming more complex and diverse. She understands the unity in diversity that makes up the rich interdependent webs of life within this forest and is horrified by the cultural vacuum that wants to annihilate it. There have been similar cultures, cultures out of touch with their ecologies and sticking to entrenched beliefs. They all wrecked their life support systems and eventually collapsed. Robbing the future to pay the present was the hallmark of every civilization whose ruins now scatter the deserts.

The government has said they want to "cleanse" La ZAD before November 2012, so that they can begin the archaeological surveys and ecosystems services swaps. By law the headlands of all watershed should be protected and for every wetlands destroyed two have to be created elsewhere. Vinci however, is trying to challenge these laws in court, the verdict will be heard next month. If the ecosystems services project goes ahead it plans to move newts from twelve marshes to a new habitat. It's the twisted logic of capitalism that thinks that you can swap one ecosystem for another, a market mindset where everything has become a commodity – a thing devoid of context. It's the final gasps of a culture that has forgotten that our world is made up of relationships and not things.



them." The green party also kept silent on the airport plans following the presidential elections so that they would be given cabinet seats. Now they, together with a bunch of bandwagon hitchers, are demanding the end of the evictions. But solidarity feels empty when you know that it is based on vote-winning and popular opinion. The Zadist wanted Saturday's action to be seen as a popular uprising, freed from political parties, they had asked that no one bring party placards or flags, the request was followed fairly well. Ishmel was part of a clown army who took on the role of throwing mud at those who refused – "the large red flags of the NPA (Trotskyist party) made easy targets" he jokes.

We return to the construction site. So many hands working together over the last three days have built miracles. The main structure of our *Black Bloc Sanitaire* is finished and we are putting the last touches to our wood fired boiler, there are two dormitories with working stoves, the large communal meeting room is having its windows fitted, the kitchen is filling up with donated vegetables and the workshop has a forge churning out catapults. There are even new plans for a bar christened *No TAVerne* (a reference to the No TAV movement against the Lyon-Turin high speed railway project).

The idea is that this new settlement temporarily named *la Chât-teigne* will function as a collective space from which to organize resistance to the airport. Other kit houses brought on Saturday, are still waiting to be put up on the zone for individual living spaces. *La Chât-teigne* will remain collectively run by all the groups who helped build it. On the improvised infoboard a chalk message reads: "Spare 20m square cabin ready – ring 067674196 to tell us where." It doesn't take long to find a home for it in the Rohanne Forest under the tree houses that have already been rebuilt since the evictions.

We work all day on the shower block. By late afternoon I start to feel peckish. I'm standing on the roof nailing the tin down when someone hands me a large platter of oysters, a bottle of cider and a joint: "This is what utopia looks like!" I quip. "...and it's delicious!"



Monday November 19th

Jean is on his mobile phone when we arrive in his farmyard. He is discussing the media representation of the reoccupation – “Ok I better get back to my cows, see you later.” He turns to us. “The mobile phone reception is getting worse, it’s got to be the cops”. Jean has a herd of 37 dairy cows. When the Zadists first arrived he was never particularly friendly. The strange breed of de-growth post-capitalist activists felt a million miles away from his life as a farmer. But little by little links were made, first over aperitifs, then through discussions about farming. The Zadists asked if he could reduce the chemicals he was spraying on the maize fields next to their cabins, he agreed and eventually began to test organic methods on some of his crops. Now he has become one of the many members of this frontline community of affected farmers whose solidarity with the Zadists has strengthened over the years. On the wall of his outhouse there is his complex milking timetable, next to it an anarchist poster declaring “NO to full time employment.”

We have come with Ishmel to help him move some of his belongings that have been stored in Jean’s attic since his house was destroyed last month. “I’ve got all sorts in my loft” Jean explains “solar panels, wind turbines, power tools. But mostly I have lines of washing. Nothing dries on the Zone, it’s so humid, the Zadists come here to dry clothes.”

There are already preliminary archaeological digs taking place on his land where the airports access roads are due to be built. “Last week the cops came with their bulldozers and I suggested a short cut to them – no need to take the road, you can go via the bottom of my field – I told them. They were really grateful for the tip.” He winks cheekily. “A few minutes later their commander walked back up here fuming. Their machine had sunk deep into the mud. It’s marshland down there! You don’t need much to resist, just a bit of local knowledge!” His hearty laugh chuffs clouds of steam into the cold December air.

In fact the humidity has become one of the resisters’ greatest helpers. Not only in terms of legal challenges around wetland disruption. The riot police in their heavy body armor find it hard to navigate through the thick mud and when a shower of well aimed sludge rains down onto their visors they become even more disorientated. All of them have been shipped in from afar, La ZAD is alien territory for them, they are used to policing streets, football stadiums and town squares, not forests and fields. It becomes particularly disconcerting for them at night when out of the dark woods comes the howl of wolves, emanating from the mouths of Zadists avoiding their road blocks by passing across country.



We move Ishmel’s belongings to his new home, a kitsch caravan lent to him by a local. “Someone gave me Jose Bove’s pipe last night!” Ishmel whispers.

“What?” Isa’s eyes nearly burst out of their sockets.

Bové was part of a group of green MP’s who, on the eve of the reoccupation action, broke into a boarded up building on the edges of la ZAD to symbolically “squat” it in front of a gaggle of press cameras. A radical farmer involved in the Larzac rebellion, infamously imprisoned for dismantling a McDonald’s in 1999 and more recently for anti-GMO actions, he is now a green member of the European Parliament. His trademark symbols are his Asterix-like moustache and pipe.

“We made bets” Ishmel continues - “200 Euros for stealing Bove’s pipe during the reoccupation demo and 300 for Eva Joly’s signature glasses (Green Party presidential candidate). I don’t think anyone managed to grab the glasses.”

There have been heated debates around the role of political parties in the struggle. A year ago, before La ZAD became a household name in France, some local Green Party (EELV) MP’s had called the Zadists “violent agitators” and “extremists”. “These Ultras are totally autonomous,” one of them told the press “we don’t know how to get rid of

The state assumed that by destroying the Zadists houses and gardens they would demoralize the movement. They thought it would collapse when its material base had been removed. But quite the opposite has happened. “Our home is not the cob walls and haybales, the bricks and mortar,” says Sara, whose house was raised to the ground last week, “but the land and the neighbors and it’s those connections that have been strengthened during the evictions”. It’s not just the friendships between activists on the barricades but also the complex relationships between the Zadists, the locals and farmers that have evolved. “It’s been a roller coaster over the years,” Sara continues. “There have been strong moments of togetherness but many of mutual misunderstanding and mistrust. There are some huge ideological differences between us “the squatters” and the folk at ACIPA (The anti-airport NGO made up of local farmers and residents) but since the evictions, new levels of mutual aid and support have emerged that were once thought impossible.” Not only did Sylvain Frenau’s open his barn as an HQ for everybody, but the ACIPA has set up a daily meeting point to bring newcomers into the Zone to resist the evictions, farmers and locals have stood as human shields between the masked activists and the riot police, whilst other have helped build barricades with their tractors and loaned out chain saws. The French state and media has tried undermine exactly this kind of sharing and support over the years by labeling the “squatters” as members of the “Ultragauche” (the ultra leftists).

A mythical term invented by a neurotic government, *Les Utragauche*, has been used to criminalize anti-capitalist anti-authoritarian movements and throw the shadow of terrorism on to anyone influenced by the so called: “insurrectionist sect” that wrote the now infamous (and according to right wing U.S TV anchor Glen Beck “evil”) book - *The Coming Insurrection*. The term is a weapon of repression used to divide the “good protesters” from the “bad” and to prevent diverse movements arising. What the government can’t control is a movement where farmers ploughing and planting monocultures are rebelling side by side with Permaculturists who practice no dig gardening, where older trade unionists sit in meetings with young anarchists who demand an identity beyond work, where libertarian-communists teach pensioners how to forage wild foods and anti-civilization vegans are lent tools by dairy farmers. It is the dynamic diversity of ecosystems which keeps them strong and resilient to shocks, movements that find unity in diversity are much harder to destroy than houses and forests and the new socialist government knows this.



It's been three weeks since the evictions began; *Le Sabot* and *Les Cent Chenes* have been razed as have many of the other spaces. Two squatted farmhouses are still waiting for eviction papers whilst every time the police tear down the barricades around the *Phar West* they pop up again like mushrooms – as I write, its tree houses and huge communal kitchen remain intact and people are already rebuilding in hidden nooks and crannies of the Zone. Thanks to the pressure on the government from hunger striking farmers last summer, locals who have refused to sell cannot be evicted until all legal recourses have been exhausted. The trial around the destruction of wetlands is due to end in December.

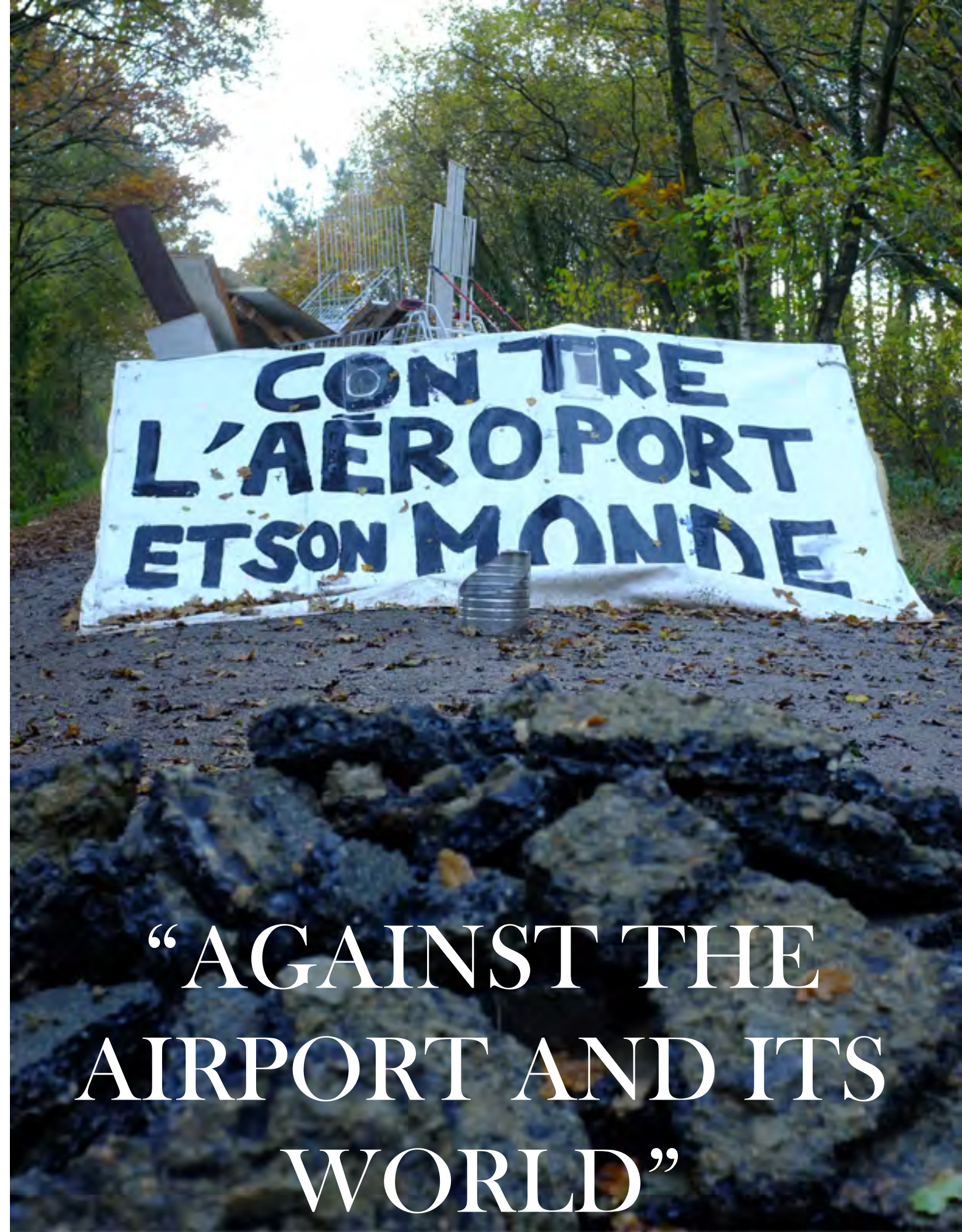
In many struggles, the moment of eviction tends to be the last great cry after which the movement fades. But quite the opposite has occurred, something in the fight to save La ZAD has resonated with people. The last three weeks have completely transformed this struggle from a relatively local debate into an issue of national importance. Everyone on the ground expected the media to run images of masked youth throwing molotovs (3 in all were thrown!) and to play the “Ultragauche” card which would have scared people away and opened the door to harsher police repression. But this did not happen and instead solidarity began to flow and flow. Support groups sprung up in cities and villages across France. Meetings, demonstrations and actions erupted from Toulouse to Strasbourg, Brussels to Besançon: Graffiti and banners appeared on dozens of motorway bridges, a clown army invaded the offices of Vinci, thousands marched in Rennes, Nantes and Paris, a go slow blocked commuter traffic into Nantes, Vinci car parks were occupied and made free for motorists, the studios of a national radio programme were invaded and statement read on air, a street theatre pieces married Vinci and the state and the windows of several socialist party HQ's were smashed.

Front pages in the regional and then the national press including *Le Monde*, began to talk about La ZAD as the “new Larzac”. Beginning in the 1970s the Larzac was a rural area of Southern France where a mass movement brought farmers and activists together against the expansion of a military base. It is seen as an iconic struggle not only due to it linking radically different cultures but also because it won. In 1981 the recently elected socialist president François Mitterrand cancelled the project. To name La ZAD as new Larzac is like a little known rock band being touted as the new Lady Gaga!

The discourse has expanded too. Many now see the choice to build an airport as yet another symptom of a system totally out of touch with reality. It's a choice from another age, an age where climate change and peak oil were not yet threats, an age where the ideology of infinite growth was all that defined progress, an age where people talked about economic crisis rather than the economy *as* crisis. It seems that what is touching people is the destruction of ways of life that refuse to be part of such an antiquated society. It is the farmer's firm stand, risking everything so that they can continue to produce food from their land that moves us. It is the Zadists' simple lives, lived according to their passions and their needs that gives us glimpses of the future in the present. These things make so much more sense than a new airport built for political ego, corporations and profits. And now the story is no longer just about an airport, but about making the choice to oil the suicide machine wrecking our future or becoming its counter friction and opening new visions of what it means to live.

A year ago, the Zadists put out a call for a day of Reoccupation to take place four weekends following the anticipated evictions. They asked people to come with hammers, planks and pitchforks, to reoccupy the land and build. When they wrote the text little did they realize that the evictions would have transformed La ZAD into a household name. The date has been set for the 17th of November. Every Tuesday for the past three weeks 150 people have packed out a hall in Nantes to plan the reoccupation. There are groups of local architects and carpenters busy designing a meeting house; mass catering kitchens from across Europe are preparing food for thousands; 200 tractors are being mobilized; farmers, artists and activists from the Morbihan are planning a toilet and shower bloc complete with catapult; a kit house is due to be brought 800 km from Dijon and there are even rumors that someone wants to build a “special” tower in the field where the control tower is planned.

How many people will turn up on the 17th of November no one knows, how many homes and farms will be rebuilt remains a mystery, but what is clear is that this movement is far from being finished, in many ways it has just begun.



“AGAINST THE
AIRPORT AND ITS
WORLD”



takes on a passionate quality cracking the passive consumer spectacle of capitalism. Lucille turns to me “This is what our world should look like” a smile grows across her freckled face, tears edge across her eyes.

There are still no police to be seen but if their helicopters had looked down at the tens of thousands of people working across this landscape it would have resembled a convulsing ants’ nest, a purposeful self-managed organism without central command. They might have observed that out of the complexity of this multitude a

collective intelligence was emerging, an intelligence greater than the sum of its parts. For those whose entire system is based on control and obedience, pyramids of power and hierarchies it would have been a frightening sight. The example of so many strangers cooperating in resistance is much more intimidating to the state than a burning barricade or a hail of cobblestones.

This is post-capitalism in its purest form – people creating together, organizing without leaders, driven by the intensity of their passion rather than profit margins and merging work with pleasure. “It seems that we are working perfectly well without bosses.” says Lucille as she moulds the clay around the bathtub with her hands, “could we have been lied to all our lives?” she laughs.

The coming of the night does not stop the work; under head-torches, moonlight and generators the human chains and constructions continue. At the edge of the coppice beside the timber frame of one of the buildings brought by a crew all the way from Dijon (800 kms away), someone begins to set up a drum kit and a few amps. Improvised jazz accompanies the hammering late into the night, whilst in the fields opposite under the circus tent, hundreds pogo wildly in the muddiest of moshpits to legendary Belgian punk band Rene Biname.



Saturday, November 17th – Day of Reoccupation

A yellow forklift truck leads the way; walking close behind is a block of Zadists carrying a fortified banner declaring: *No to the airport and its world*. Behind them 20 tractors pull huge agricultural trailers filled with building materials: piles of



Le convoi de tracteurs

pallets, straw bales, tires, doors, windows, prefabricated wooden walls, hundreds of planks, corrugated iron roofing, tools – pretty much anything you can think of, including kitchen sinks.

We sit on top of one of the trailers. The affinity group from our local village has decided to build one of the constructions for today’s reoccupation action – we have named it the *Black Bloc Sanitaire* – it’s a shower block and bank of compost toilets. The pile of building materials that we sit on is much messier than the trailer behind us which carries the wood

for a group of young architects. The architects have a super neat stack of carefully numbered pallets and the rumor is that they have already practiced setting up their dormitory building in the main hall of the Nantes school of architecture. Our construction doesn’t even have plans that are to scale, but we are hoping that the collective energy of the day and a dose of spontaneity will see something rise from the pile of rubbish we are sitting on. This is the opportunity of a lifetime for anyone who has ever dreamt of building their own cabin, rebel palace or fortress: A free plot of land, no planning permissions or building regulations and hundreds of people keen to help build.

None of us know where we are heading, the location has been kept a secret. From high up we see the river of human being flowing behind us, snaking through the country lanes as far as the eye can see. As always, we have Radio Klaxon on in the background, they have just announced that the mainstream media think that there are 40,000 people at the action and over 400 tractors! We are all here on an illegal demonstration whose aim is to build a rebel settlement together on the land earmarked for the airport. Last night the president interrupted a state visit of Poland to make a statement about the protest, reminding the French public of the “power of the law.”



A year ago, when I first saw the flyer for this action, with its floating date to reoccupy 4 weeks after the first eviction, I thought it was a great idea but that it would just be a handful of tired, traumatized, post-eviction activists symbolically rebuilding a couple of huts. Little did I imagine I would be taking part in one of the largest act of mass disobedience I’ve ever experienced and that we would have enough material to build a hamlet. The fact that there is not a single police officer in sight, however, not even a helicopter watching above, is strangely disconcerting.



stay of execution as the authorities would have to follow legal proceedings before destroying the buildings.

The tractor turns off the main road into a long straight potholed lane, we must be nearing the site. Jules, our local sheep farmer has been swigging beer bottles all the way. His hold atop our pile is becoming increasing precarious as the convoy stops and starts. The tractors grind to a halt and people start pouring into the field beside us, a huge blue circus tent is rising, a truck with a sound system is set up – it’s time to unload. A fortnight ago, at the dead of night, Jules and I were graffitiing a series of motorway bridges together. That night, as we painted slogans announcing the date of the reoccupation, we knew that something was in the air, that this day could be a game changer for the struggle of La ZAD. What we had not realized was that it would be a day that also changed us.

A newly cut path leads into the middle of a sprawling sweet chestnut coppice. Thousands of people are lined up either side of the track, shoulder to shoulder, forming human chains that stretch over half a kilometer from the tractors to the building site. Piece by piece, hand by hand, they pass construction materials along the lines. Planks, drainpipes, furniture, pots and pans, logs, bathtubs, stoves – everything one needs to build a settlement – all passed between so many strangers in the seemingly spontaneous effortless choreography of cooperation.



A “magic” clandestine group of farmers and activists chose the plot of land where the new buildings will be erected. The organizing assembly (of over 150 people) decided by consensus that we should not squat land that already belonged to the airport builders (such as all the plots evicted over the past month) but work with one of the owners of the many private properties that is still in the process of expropriation. This would give the new settlement a

Within minutes the roots of trees are removed, hundreds of old car tires are filled with earth for foundations and prefabricated walls begin to rise in the two clearings. People are swarming around the building sites brandishing tools, others look on in amazement. Frank, who is coordinating our team, kneels in the mud, our rough plans in his hands, he is staring at the 300 pallets flowing his way on a seemingly unstoppable human tide – he’s at a loss for words. The human chains just keep bringing material into the woods. I turn away to chat with Lucille about where to build our cob bathtub boiler, by the time I turn back around, another construction has risen up out of the crowd.



In the creative chaos no one seems to be bumping into anyone, nothing is being dropped or broken. There is a certain grace about self-organization at this scale, a surprising suppleness of so many bodies working together. People are smiling, laughing, joking; they are sharing a sense of purpose yet feeling part of something so much bigger than themselves. This has become something much more than simply a rebel crowd, it has become an intelligent swarm fuelled by the irresistible spirit of disobedience.

The sun inches under the tree line. The sound of hundreds of hammering hammers fills the woodland. A field kitchen begins to cook. A medics’ tent has been set up next to a large tepee-like structure rising up through the branches. In the woods, a group is weaving chestnut cuttings into what looks like the gate of a medieval fortress, we ask them to teach us how to do it and an impromptu wood weaving workshop takes place. In the clearing the architects have dug a well for water and are collecting bucket loads of clay. A Breton bag pipe plays and dozens of muddy feet dance joyfully on the straw and clay to mix the cob. Another makeshift team is cramming the mixture between the walls to form insulation for



the dormitory, which is beginning to resemble a Swiss mountain chalet despite being built entirely of industrial pallets.

From a neighboring field comes the sound of a women’s choir singing: “La Java des Bons-Enfants” a catchy dance hall tune about an infamous 19th century anarchist attack with lyrics by Guy Debord, godfather of Situationism. “The radiant future is taking place” the song ends “and the old world has been sent to the junkyard”. Debord would have recognized the beauty of this moment, this passageway into the marvelous, where life